

Remarks by Chargé d'Affaires Alan Misenheimer
Black History Month Celebration
February 3, 2008 at 7:00pm
Al-Babtain Central Library for Arabic Poetry

It is a great pleasure to welcome everyone here tonight to celebrate America's Black History Month. Each year, in February, the United States honors the achievements of African Americans and their contributions to American society. It is a proud and defining attribute of my country that we recognize, and celebrate, the achievements of all our citizens; and the accomplishments of African-American men and women – often achieved at great personal sacrifice, and in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles – are great, indeed.

Tonight, we salute well-known African Americans such as American Revolutionary War hero, Crispus Attucks; organizer of the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman; civil rights leaders, Coretta Scott and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; famous television personality, Oprah Winfrey; and Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall; to name just a few.

But we also salute Americans of all races who have done their bit, in myriad ways – often overlooked by the media and historians – to advance equality, tolerance, and inclusiveness in America over the years.

America's official observance of February as Black History Month goes back to the efforts of historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. In February 1926 he proposed the establishment of "Negro History Week" to honor the history and contributions of African Americans to American life. The United States Embassy in Kuwait is proud to mark the tradition that has become Black History Month.

The fact that an African American is a candidate running for the nomination for President of a major political party in America's primary campaigns this year is justifiably attracting a lot of attention around the world. Regardless of who finally wins our presidential election next November, the fact that an African American is a serious contender to become the next American President is an indication of how far black

Americans have come in overcoming the inequalities of the past. It also shows how far Americans of other racial and ethnic backgrounds – all of us – have come in overcoming the prejudices of the past.

Progress toward uniting all our citizens under one, inclusive standard of justice and civil rights is a central theme of America's history. We are so pleased to gather tonight with our friends here in Kuwait, in this beautiful library, to celebrate that progress in the observance of Black History Month.

And what better way to celebrate than a diverse cultural program featuring Ms. Gina Loring – who is not only an accomplished African American poet, songwriter and activist, but also a genuine friend of Kuwait?

I am honored to stand at this podium and proudly proclaim America's commitment to equality, inclusiveness and democracy; and to welcome you all, once again, to this joyous celebration of Black History Month.